



Innovation Spotlight: Opioid Addiction Recovery in New Hampshire

In a series called “Innovation Spotlight,” Joint Economic Committee Democrats are highlighting cutting-edge policy solutions that empower small towns and rural communities across the nation. This edition looks at opioid addiction recovery programs in New Hampshire.

Problem: In 2016, more than 2.1 million people, aged 12 and over, struggled with substance use disorders related to opioids in the United States. Further, 626,000 people, aged 12 and over, had heroin-related substance use disorders that same year, with four out of five new heroin users starting by first misusing prescription painkillers.¹ The opioid epidemic has resulted in huge costs for communities including increased health care expenditures, premature death and incarceration, and lost productivity. These costs amounted to more than \$80 billion in 2013; a 590 percent increase since 2001.²

Background: In New Hampshire, 380 people died from opioid overdoses in 2015.³ The city of Nashua suffered 45 opioid related overdoses with seven fatalities in October 2016, alone. This followed seven fatalities the month before.⁴ And, from May 2016 through December 2016, the city of Manchester suffered 509 overdoses and 49 deaths.⁵

Solution: Chris Hickey, a Manchester EMS Officer, helped the relative of a co-worker who walked into the central station looking for assistance with a heroin addiction. After this encounter he devised the idea of the city’s fire stations becoming “Safe Stations” - places where anyone seeking help with their addiction can come and receive access to care.⁶



After being sworn in as mayor of Nashua, Jim Donchess established the Mayor’s Opioid Task Force with the charge of developing a plan to combat opioid addiction.⁷ On November 17, 2016, the city of Nashua launched its own Nashua’s Safe Stations Program, modeled after the program in Manchester.

Anyone seeking assistance with their addiction can come to any of Manchester or Nashua’s fire stations 24/7 where a firefighter will provide them streamlined access to supportive services. In

Nashua, after doing a quick assessment, the firefighter will help transfer the person to a one of three locations where behavioral and primary health care and emergency shelter will be provided. From there the participant will work with a licensed counselor to get the services they need for their specific situation.⁸

Since kicking-off in November 2016, Nashua’s Safe Stations program has provided streamlined, integrated care to roughly 1,940 walk-in requests and saw a 16 percent decrease in opioid related fatalities.⁹ Similarly in its first year of operation Manchester’s program assisted 1,529 participants.¹⁰

Looking Ahead: As states and localities work to stop the opioid crisis, the Safe Station model can be utilized by any community with a fire station that can partner with local, reputable addiction recovery and community care organizations. In fact, other versions of the program have popped up since in Anne Arundel County, Maryland and Providence, Rhode Island.¹¹

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- ¹ <http://www.nsc.org/learn/nsc-initiatives/pages/prescription-drug-abuse.aspx>;
<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR1-2016/NSDUH-FFR1-2016.htm#opioid1>;
<https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/opioid-addiction-disease-facts-figures.pdf>
- ² Dollars are in 2016 dollars; <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democrats/reports?ID=9EC0FFD8-DD55-4238-9F8B-1374D6E98DC5>
- ³ https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/6c604f91-3d90-4b0e-bdec-25780bfc9167/state-opioid-epidemic-fact-sheets.pdf
- ⁴ 2017 State of the City Address by Nashua Mayor Jim Donchess, Transcript,
<https://www.nashuanh.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5450>
- ⁵ <http://nhpr.org/post/success-manchester-safe-station-drug-program-faces-bigger-hurdles-elsewhere#stream/0>
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ 2017 State of the City Address by Nashua Mayor Jim Donchess, Transcript,
<https://www.nashuanh.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/5450>
- ⁸ <http://keystonehall.org/safestation/>
- ⁹ Information provided via e-mail by Nashua Fire Rescue
- ¹⁰ https://www.manchesternh.gov/Portals/2/Departments/fire/images/SAFESTATION_INFOGRAPHIC.pdf
- ¹¹ <http://www.providencejournal.com/news/20171211/providence-firehouses-to-become-safe-stations-for-people-battling-opioid-epidemic> ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/md-politics/in-md-county-ravaged-by-drug-addiction-fire-and-police-stations-open-their-doors/2017/09/04/c4188be6-8e57-11e7-84c0-02cc069f2c37_story.html?utm_term=.ef7ee1bd7648